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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CU](#) [SW](#)

SUBJECT: SWEDEN: CONFERENCE ON DEMOCRATIC CHANGE IN CUBA

Classified By: Polcouns Casey Christensen, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (sbu) Polcouns attended the February 6-7 Conference "Democratic Change in Cuba: Who are the Actors," which gathered about 100 representatives of NGOs, embassies, and political parties (we have requested an electronic version of the list of participants, and will forward) from around Europe. The conference was sponsored by the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba, under the auspices of the Czech Embassy, and with support from the foundations of the Swedish International Liberal Center, the Christian Democrat International Center, and the Olof Palme Center. The Swedish political representatives ranged from governing party Social Democrats Urban Ahlin and Kaj Nordquist (respectively Chair and member of Parliament, s Foreign Affairs Committee) to opposition leaders Christian Democrat Party head Goran Hagglund and Liberal Member of the European Parliament Cecilia Malmstrom. There was general agreement about the right of the Cuban people to debate and define their own future, and a recognition of the key role of the U.S., with several calls for greater U.S./European coordination of effort.

12. (sbu) Left Party (communist) protesters held a banner saying "Stop the U.S. Blockade" at the outdoor event that kicked-off the conference. Malmquist, Hagglund, Ahlin, and Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar all underscored the appropriate irony of having communist supporters of the Castro regime present and freely criticizing an event dedicated to supporting the right of Cubans to express their views and seek democratic transition -- a right denied in Cuba. Ahlin said that although he did not agree with the embargo, he supported the right of Cubans to make their own political choices. He added that he had been criticized for his support of the Conference by many who somehow viewed Castro as an unassailable romantic hero. He said Castro was a dictator, and Cubans deserved the right to chose their leaders.

13. (sbu) The approach of both having doubts about the effectiveness of the US embargo and taking a hard line against Castro on abuses of human and political rights was stated by several conference presenters and attendees. The role of the U.S. in supporting Cuban transition was generally acknowledged as central, and there were several calls for greater coordination of efforts between Europe and the U.S.

14. (c) Czech DFM Pojar made forceful interventions at several instances during the conference, calling for a unified European approach that makes no concessions to Castro, s regime unless Cuba allows greater political freedom -- and frees the prisoners. He told us he was planning a trip to the U.S. in a few weeks, and expected to talk Cuba, among other topics.

15. (c) From the Swedish perspective, the line-up of support was interesting. Ahlin is a key Social Democrat. The

opposition, which stands a chance of winning this September,s parliamentary elections, was represented by the Liberals and the Christian Democrats, and co-sponsored the Seminar. The Moderates, the largest opposition party, were notably absent, as was the Center Party. If there is regime change in Sweden, the center/right presumably would take at least as tough a line on Castro as the governing Social Democrat party has taken. For the Social Democrats, the primary concern has been human rights abuses. The opposition parties like Castro,s general political line even less than the Social Democrats.

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